

**THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
CLEVELAND 6, OHIO**

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GOHIMITSU BOSATSU

The Oriental Department of The Cleveland Museum of Art has recently acquired a late twelfth century Japanese painted mandala which is a mystical representation of the universe divided and organized into its manifest forms. It is popularly referred to as a magic picture. Known as GOHIMITSU BOSATSU, this mandala was one of the most secret images of the Shingon or "True Word" sect of esoteric Buddhism. It was used by priests as an icon in the private rite of confession. The Cleveland mandala represents God-priest, Vajrasattva, receiving confession from an earthly priest.

In esoteric Buddhism the Bodhisattva Vajrasattva is not a symbol but a deity - the foremost manifestation of the all-pervasive Supreme Buddha from whom came all forms, beings, substances, actions, causes and results. Vajrasattva transmitted by thought the "True Word" from the Supreme Buddha to the first earthly believer. The three main secrets taught by the "True Word" sect were "body secret" expressed through posture and hand gesture, "language secret" expressed by magical word combinations and "thought secret" acquired by concentration on the original vows. Attainment of these secrets could be achieved through identification of the worshipper with the image, whether it was carved, painted or imagined.

Esoteric doctrines are so profound that they cannot be explained in writing but obscurities may be understood with the help of painting. Thus art, particularly the making of images and icons was of the highest significance in the Shingon sect. The various attitudes and hand gestures of the holy images all have their source in Buddha's love and one may attain Buddhahood at sight of them. The objective of the worshipper is to imitate exactly the gestures, words and thoughts of the image. Thus the secrets of the sutras and commentaries can be depicted in art, and the essential truths of esoteric teaching set forth. Neither teacher nor student can dispense with art since it reveals the state of perfection.

GOHIMITSU BOSATSU, meaning "The Secret Five" Bodhisattva, symbolizes the four causes of human distress - Desire, Passion, Sense-Joy and Anger-Pride. The

central image is Vajrasattva himself, white in color and holding a five pointed symbol and a vajra-bell. To Vajrasattva's right front is Desire, red in color, holding the arrow of love or desire. At the back, to Vajrasattva's right, is Sense-Joy, white in color, embracing Vajrasattva. To the deity's left and behind him is Passion, green-colored, holding a banner staff crowned with the ancient Hindu symbol, dragon-fish of the waters. At his left front is Pride, yellow-colored, both hands making vajra-fists, a powerful, clenched gesture.

The five figures are shown seated on a lotus flower representing the Great Wisdom beyond life and death. Behind is a moon-disc. The group, considered as a whole, portrays the virtue of the Great Compassion which declines to cross over into Nirvana, the Buddhist goal of non-being.

Only five of these secret confessional images are presently known and of these the Cleveland example takes priority in date, style and quality. Only the Cleveland GOHIMITSU BOSATSU follows closely the old Shingon iconographic tradition and the melting and sensuous geometry of the Heian period (794-1185) style. Its color, glowing and beautifully preserved, is at least a symbolic testimony to its secret power.

The Museum purchased GOHIMITSU BOSATSU through the Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund. It is now on exhibition in gallery thirty.